

# **Accessibility in Downtown Peterborough Businesses**

Final Report

by

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# ACCESSIBILITY IN DOWNTOWN PETERBOROUGH BUSINESSES

Trent University: Trent Community Research Centre  
Community Based Research Project  
Faculty Advisor: Mark Skinner  
Host Organization: BIG IDeA, Simon Treviranus  
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## **Executive Summary**

This summary is a synthesis of our project and the main outcomes we have discovered through our research. The attitudes and decisions of Downtown Peterborough Business Owners in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion were explored. We conducted our study on the stores that were accessible from the sidewalk on George and Charlotte Street. Our research design consisted of a literature review of accessibility legislation and scholarly sources to help inform and analyze our research. We conducted a stakeholder consultation with the Council for Peoples with Disabilities to hear their perspectives and experiences with Downtown Peterborough businesses. Thirty-six surveys from a variety of Downtown Peterborough businesses were collected and interviews with four business owners were conducted. Through our research design we were able to determine many findings about accessibility in Downtown Peterborough.

## **Survey Results**

- 72% of business owners are aware of the existence AODA
- They understand under the legislation that they need to be inclusive of people regardless of their ability
- There is a lack of understanding on the specific requirements of AODA
- Some business owners are meeting some of the legislation regulations required for their business
- 33% of business owners are aware of the accessible customer service standards
- 61% perceive their business as being accessible, however they only focus on the built environment as a place that needs to be accessible
- 36% of business owners report that lack of money is a barrier to making their business accessible
- There many other barriers which exist to making their business accessible
  - Renting the building
  - The Heritage Act
  - Themselves
  - Lack of knowledge on accessibility and legislation
  - Built environment and space shortage
  - Belief that the need and demand for accessibility in their business is low

- 61% of business owners would be comfortable asking someone for help on how to make their business more accessible

### Interview Results

- Business owners believe accessibility is important and should be a priority
- There is no formal training for staff regarding accessibility and inclusion
- ¾ business were open to the idea of hiring a person with a disability
- Believe that their customer service is stellar

### Key Findings

- Money is a barrier for accessibility
- Lack of legislation understanding
- Only considers physical disabilities when accommodating
- Lack of awareness of how to accommodate
- Businesses have no formal training on accessibility
- Gap in the service businesses think they provide, and the service people with disabilities feel they receive

### Recommendations

- Implement specific accessibility training into businesses
- Highlight businesses who are excelling in accessibility
- Provide business owners with an outline on the benefits of making their business accessible
- Provide business owners with a brief guide outlining simple ways to make their business more accessible

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*”Inclusion is important. If you do not include everyone what is the point in being a business?”  
- Research Participant*

As the research participant alludes above, accessibility is an important topic for the City of Peterborough. Legislation states that all people, regardless of their abilities should be able to access businesses and services (Access Ontario, 2017). This research project was proposed by BIG IDeA to determine how Downtown Peterborough business owners perceive and cater to accessibility and inclusion in their establishments. Understanding how business owners perceive accessibility is necessary in creating an inclusive downtown where all people can participate in what the downtown has to offer. This project aims to identify the perceptions and attitudes of business owners in order to help BIG IDeA create a more inclusive space. The findings uncovered from this project will help BIG IDeA provide business owners with support to help them make their businesses more accessible to all people.

### **1.1 Goals and Objectives**

This community-based research project has many objectives with the overall goal being to gain a better understanding about accessibility in Downtown Peterborough. As well, it tries to identify why Downtown Peterborough business owners are not being inclusive when it comes to providing accessible services to persons with disabilities and what is preventing their businesses from being fully accessible. This project also seeks to investigate businesses in Peterborough in order to understand the owners’ levels of knowledge regarding disability legislation and their attitudes towards making businesses inclusive. Finally, this project encourages the implementation of more inclusive and accessible designs and practices for downtown businesses in Peterborough.



This project includes several research questions that will help guide the project to obtaining its goals and objectives. These questions include:

- How knowledgeable are local business owners and what are their attitudes towards the pre-existing legislation surrounding disability accessibility?
- What do local business owners perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of responding to accessibility needs?
- What steps have local business owners already taken to become accessible and inclusive in their environments?
- What do local business owners perceive as an accessible and inclusive business?
- What support do local businesses want/need in order to meet accessibility requirements?
- What barriers do owners see to making their businesses accessible?
- What level of priority is accessibility and inclusion for local businesses?

## **1.2 Key Terms**

Accessible - is easy to be reached, entered, or used (Dictionary).

Inclusive - inclusive refers to the way that our society treats people with disabilities. Any physical barriers that prohibit a person with a disability from acquiring complete access, creates a culture of exclusion (Dictionary).

Disability - a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs or limits one's ability to participate in certain activities or actions (Dictionary).

Attitudes - Attitudes refer to a way of thinking about a person, or group of people and often impacts a person's behaviours towards such individuals (Dictionary).

AODA - Accessibility for Ontarians Act 2005, for people with visible and non-visible disabilities

(Access Ontario, 2017)

CPD - Council for Persons with Disabilities

DBIA - Downtown Business Association in Peterborough, includes over 400 businesses from Peterborough's downtown core (City of Peterborough)

Big IDeA - Business Innovation Guide for Inclusive Design and Accessibility

### **1.3 Research Design**

This is a community-based research project, meaning members from the community developed the project to specifically study the perceptions of Peterborough's downtown business owners when it comes to meeting accessibility needs. The research takes place within the community and is for the community. The project was proposed by the community organization, BIG IDeA and was developed in conjunction with the Trent Community Research Centre. Our first method of research involved a stakeholder meeting where members from CPD provided insights regarding the current nature of accessibility and inclusion in Peterborough's downtown. Next, utilizing an exploratory method, two transects of the downtown core were identified based on the direction of the road and the variety of store-front businesses present on each road. George and Charlotte Street were used as the transects. Surveys were personally distributed to businesses on George Street and Charlotte Street. In total, there were 36 respondents to the survey. Interviews were then conducted on the same population based on the businesses who agreed to participate. In total, 4 interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person. The data from the surveys was analyzed using descriptive methods and thematic analysis was used for the interview data.

## **1.4 Structure of the Report**

This community-based research project has been set up in five different chapters. The first is an introduction to present the topic and to explain the goals of the project, the research questions used to help guide the project and the key terms of the project. This section will also outline the design of the research methods used. The literature review follows the introduction. This will provide insights from academic research pertaining to the field of accessibility. It serves as a contextualizing tool to provide necessary background information to the topic of accessibility and to allow for a deeper understanding of the legislation currently in place for businesses in regard to accessibility. It also includes characteristics of the legislation. The third chapter is the methodology, which discusses the specific methods used to conduct research and how information was gathered and analyzed. The findings are presented in the fourth chapter, outlining and discussing the results from the surveys and interviews. Furthermore, it states the trends that were found within the data set. The final chapter presents the conclusion and includes a summary of the research, as well as any limitations the researchers faced throughout the project. This section also discusses any further research opportunities that this project may have developed.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

BIG IDeA wishes to know how the business owners of Downtown Peterborough perceive accessibility and inclusion. BIG IDeA also endeavours to determine how much business owners understand about the existing accessibility legislation. The organization also hopes to discern how some businesses are catering to accessibility and where they might need to improve in order to be as inclusive as possible. In order to gain a better understanding of these aspects of Peterborough businesses, a review of the literature was conducted. The review consists of four sections. The first section outlines the legislation and what business owners are required to have within their businesses. Knowing the regulations is essential in determining whether business owners are being compliant. The second section identifies benefits which occur after a business becomes more successful at complying with the legislation. The third section identifies what other studies have previously determined regarding the perceptions of business owners when it comes to catering for accessibility. The final section outlines best practices for businesses to follow in order to be fully accessible. All of the literature reviewed will frame this research project, providing the necessary information to fully understand the importance of accessibility within businesses.

### **2.1 What Businesses Must Include for Accessibility**

Businesses of all kinds need to take accessibility into consideration. Making businesses accessible to the entire community is not only encouraged, but necessary for inclusion and equality. Today, nearly one in five Ontarians have a disability (Access Ontario, 2017). Businesses need to consider how they can best accommodate these individuals, so they can participate in the services provided by the business. However, 70% of disabilities are invisible

(Access Ontario, 2017) making it difficult for owners to know how to accommodate without guidelines or regulations in place. Today, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) outlines accessibility requirements businesses are required to include. AODA became a law on June 13, 2005, with the aim of making Ontario fully accessible to all people with disabilities by 2025 (Accessibility Consultants, 2011). AODA works in accordance with Customer Service laws within the Ontario Regulation, which came into effect on January 1, 2008, and expected full compliance by 2010 (Accessibility Consultants, 2011).

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service applies to private and non-profit sector employers with at least one employee in Ontario that sell goods and services (Accessibility Consultants, 2011). Different types of businesses have different accessibility requirements that need to be abided by. Additionally, businesses with different numbers of employees have different requirements. Under AODA, there are five key standards. These standards are laws that individuals, government, businesses, non-profits, and public-sector organizations must follow in order to be accessible (Ontario, 2017). These accessibility standards help organizations identify, remove and prevent barriers that might limit people with disabilities from partaking in their services. The first standard addresses business policies, procedures and practices such as employee training (Accessibility Consultants, 2011). This standard does not focus on structural changes that need alterations within the buildings, but rather the attitudinal and systemic changes that create barriers for those with different abilities (Accessibility Consultants, 2011). The second regulation removes barriers of accessing information in person, print, telephone, online, or alternative means (Accessibility Consultants, 2011). This can mean having a braille menu available, readable versions of information online that a computer can read, or having means of communication available for those who are hearing impaired. The third standard addresses the

barriers in transportation that those with disabilities face (Accessibility Consultants, 2011). Therefore, public transportation is working towards fully accessible services. Employment accessibility standards are being addressed to ensure that fair recruitment, hiring and retention policies and practices are used to give all individuals an equal opportunity to obtain employment. The final regulation addresses the built environment of buildings, providing accessibility in all aspects of the building (Accessibility Consultants, 2011).

The province of Ontario outlines a detailed guide for business accessibility requirements and a timeline for when they need to be fully abided by. Guidelines differ for the size of business and the number of employees in most cases. Guidelines that apply to all businesses are surrounding service counters and fixed waiting lines (Ontario, 2017). Businesses with service counters must make at least one counter accessible to those who use mobility aids (Ontario, 2017). This means that the counter needs to be low enough for the individual with mobility needs to interact with the employee at ease (Ontario, 2017). As well, this counter needs to have enough space for a chair or mobility device to fit under the table (Ontario, 2017). In addition, any business with a fixed waiting line, such as a bank or grocery store, must ensure the line is wide enough to accommodate any mobility aids (Ontario, 2017). The waiting line also needs to be identifiable through the use of a white cane. Therefore, posts or bumps close to the ground must be used so a cane can find the start and path of the line (Ontario, 2017). In addition to these requirements, all businesses that have fixed seating must have at least three percent of their seats accessible, meaning that they are not fixed to the ground and can be moved (Ontario, 2017).

Businesses with 1-19 employees must follow basic guidelines that are mandated for all larger businesses as well. These guidelines include providing accessible customer service through training, welcoming all service animals or support persons and creating accessible ways

for customers to provide feedback on their experiences (Ontario, 2017). In addition, all emergency and public service information needs to be provided in an accessible format, and the staff needs to know how to accommodate a safe and accessible exit in case of emergency (Ontario, 2017). All employees must also be trained in Ontario's accessibility laws (Ontario, 2017). This ensures all employees are meeting the policies and are confident in their abilities to accommodate individuals based on different needs, and how to meet their needs in a respectful and timely manner. Businesses that employ 20-49 people must abide by all of these guidelines and put an accessible policy in place so that customers know what to expect from each business. Finally, they must make employment practices accessible, such as employee training and hiring methods (Ontario, 2017).

AODA requires large businesses, with more than 50 employees, or any public-sector business to abide by all the requirements aforementioned, as well as to make an accessible outdoor path (Ontario, 2017). This includes ensuring the width and head clearance complies and the slopes are a 1 to 12 ratio (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016). In addition, the surfaces of ramps must be stable and slip resistant (Ontario, 2017). These larger businesses must keep a written record of all training their staff receives on how to serve customers of all abilities (Ontario, 2017). This includes both volunteers and all employees. They must also provide accessible information in all formats including their websites (Ontario, 2017). All aspects of the website must be accessible; thus, all pictures must have a description below, and all information must be presented in a format that can be read aloud by the computer (Ontario, 2017). These large businesses must also develop a written procedure that ensures all individual accommodation plans for employees they hire with a disability and provide written procedure that outlines these accommodations (Streamable, n.d).

All AODA guidelines and standards must be in full effect by 2025. However, exceptions are made for certain buildings. Exceptions regarding the built environment are made for buildings which have been classified as historic buildings under the Ontario Heritage Act so that not all physical changes need to be adhered to (Ontario, 2017). This literature demonstrates that the AODA may be overwhelming to business owners due to the amount of information they need to be familiar with, and distinguishing what standards apply to them.

## **2.2 Benefits of Accessibility for Business Owners**

Creating an accessible environment generates many benefits for a business. Access Ontario states, \$9.6 billion new retail spending occurs from improved accessibility within businesses (Access Ontario, 2017). As well, \$25 billion dollars is spent by people with disabilities. Therefore, having a more accessible business allows more money to be spent within a business (Access Ontario, 2017). In addition to the monetary benefits businesses incur, there are many perks which come from the general community.

Access Ontario reported 87% of people would prefer to give their business to companies that employ those with special needs. It was also reported many employers find a multitude of benefits from hiring employees with special needs (Access Ontario, 2017). Currently, the labour force is growing at a much slower speed than in the past (Lengnick-Hall, Guant, and Kulkarni, 2008). With the mass number of baby boomers retiring in the coming years, many employers face the need to hire a large number of people. Many sources believe that employers will begin to realize all of the potential and great skills individuals with disabilities possess and will look to them to solve their employee shortage (Lengnick-Hall, Guant, and Kulkarni, 2008). Currently, less than 1/8 of all persons with disabilities have full-time employment (Lengnick-Hall, Guant,



and Kulkarni, 2008). Seventy-seven percent of these businesses who have hired an individual with special needs have found they have met or exceeded employee expectations (Access Ontario, 2017). As well, 90% of these individuals had above average performance at their jobs, and 86% of them had above average attendance rates (Access Ontario, 2017). Workers with a disability are less likely to miss work and have five times better retention rates (Access Ontario, 2017). From these benefits, employers of those with special needs have found hiring individuals with a disability leads to lower staff turnover, better job performance, improved safety records and excellent customer loyalty (Access Ontario, 2017).

Many business owners have the preconceived idea that hiring individuals with disabilities would be less efficient as they do not have the same qualifications as individuals without a disability and exhibit lower job performances (Lengnick-Hall, Guant, and Kulkarni, 2008). However, research demonstrates individuals with a disability are less likely to have post-secondary degrees, yet they show improved work quality and performance than those without disabilities (Lengnick-Hall, Guant, and Kulkarni, 2008). Another common misconception preventing employers from hiring an individual with a disability is the belief that it will be very costly to accommodate the individual. However, employers who employ people with disabilities find this to be untrue. Less than four percent of people with a disability require any accommodations (Access Ontario, 2017). Those businesses who do decide to invest in accommodations report that over two-thirds of the accommodations are under five hundred dollars (Access Ontario, 2017), and very affordable for their business. Reports find that for every dollar a company invests in accommodations, they will experience an average of \$40 in benefits from increased spending (Hernandez, McDonald, Divilbiss, Horin, Velcoff, and Donoso, 2008).

When a business encourages accessibility and proper customer service, they will experience higher customer loyalty and an increase in profits (Access Ontario, 2017).

Additional benefits that are associated with hiring an individual with disabilities are seen within inter-staff communication, diversification of the workplace and acceptance (Hernandez et al., 2008). This improved the overall work environment. Companies report that hiring an individual with special needs led other employees to be more accepting of diverse groups and needs (Hernandez et al., 2008). As well, customers report that they are more pleased with companies that do hire special needs individuals as they recognize the companies' values and respect their ability to see a person as a whole and all of the qualities each employee possesses (Hernandez et al., 2008).

Businesses who hire individuals with disabilities and create a more accessible environment reap a wide variety of benefits. From monetary advancements, to a more loyal customer base and more accepting employees, businesses are more successful when they choose to be accessible.

### **2.3 Small Business Owners' Perceptions of Accessibility**

Scholarly research provides insights into how small business owners perceive accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. Despite there being scholarly research pertaining to business accessibility in the United States and Australia, there appears to be a lack of scholarly research that pertains specifically to business owners in Canada. However, there is scholarly research pertaining to business owner perceptions in other developed countries such as the United States and Australia. Though one might expect the results to be similar in Canada

because they are all from developed countries, the reader should keep in mind that some of the results may not be fully representative of what we might expect to find in Canada.

In general, it has been found by two different sets of researchers that small business owners are being compliant with accessibility and inclusion requirements for people with disabilities (Moran, 2014 and Moore, Moore & Moore, 2007). In one study conducted in the U.S., 40% of businesses were required to be compliant under the law, but in reality, 78% of businesses were actually compliant. This demonstrates 38% of businesses were catering to inclusiveness even when they did not need to be under the law (Moore, Moore & Moore, 2007). However, it is not all positive when it comes to businesses being inclusive. It was noted by Moran (2014), that business owners in Ontario are reporting fatigue because they are having difficulties identifying all of the requirements they are expected to adhere to within their businesses. Business owners state it is because the AODA legislation has different requirements based on the type of business sector they are part of and how many people they employ. Furthermore, they are feeling fatigued because they have been doing their own background research and hiring lawyers and consultants to help them determine what they need to do in order to ensure compliance and avoid any potential fines. This is significant to note because increased fatigue, frustration and financial inputs toward determining the accessibility requirements may cause a business owner to perceive inclusion in a more negative sense. This is because they have to input a considerable amount of their time into interpreting the legislation.

Moore, Moore and Moore (2007) provide insights into how business owners perceive inclusion. It was noted the personal views a business owner holds towards people with disabilities is a predictor as to whether or not they will make their business accessible and inclusive. Those who hold negative views towards people with disabilities are less likely to be

compliant with the legislation. While at the same time, those who hold positive views were more likely to be compliant with the legislation. Additionally, business owners who have a disabled employee are more likely to make their business accessible under the law. Perceptions also vary based on the size of the business. Those businesses who bring in more than \$100,000 in sales are more likely to perceive accessibility and inclusion in a positive way. The researchers note it is because they have more money available to make the required investments to make their business accessible and inclusive.

Based on the scholarly research reviewed, it would appear finance is the most important predictor of a business owner's perception when it comes to accommodating for accessibility and inclusion. The researchers report many small business owners feel they will experience a great financial impact to their business when they have to make necessary improvements and upgrades. They are afraid making improvements will take money away from other parts of their budget (Moore, Moore & Moore, 2007 & Moran, 2014). Additionally, they also fear they may have to pay fees towards fines, lawyers and defense costs if they are found to be non-compliant (Moore, Moore & Moore, 2007). This suggests that money can be a barrier in shaping a business owner's perception of accessibility and inclusion.

There are five main determinants based on the research conducted by Moore, Moore and Moore (2007) in the United States, which influence how a business owner perceives accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. Firstly, business owners want to be compliant with accessibility standards in order to avoid lawsuits and fines. Secondly, they want to be compliant because they may see new markets. Thirdly, they suspect they will experience a long-term financial gain as they become more inclusive. Fourthly, they want to become more inclusive to meet the needs of a disabled employee. Finally, they want to take advantage of a tax credit which

will help them make their business more accessible. There are many factors such as personal views and financial characteristics, which influence how a business owner perceives accommodating for accessibility and inclusion.

#### **2.4 Best Practices on How to Help a Business Become Accessible**

The literature reviewed outlines some best practices regarding how to help businesses become compliant with accessibility requirements. Moore, Moore and Moore (2007), note that making businesses aware of the benefits of making their businesses accessible will increase compliance. This is important because providing business owners with this information would not be very costly. Providing business owners with an easy to read pamphlet indicating the statistics and benefits outlined in the previous section of the literature review titled, “Benefits of Accessibility for Business Owners”, would be a method of ensuring that they are aware of the benefits of inclusion.

The literature reviewed outlines how businesses can make their business more accessible to include people with a wide range of abilities. Solarah and Johnson (2017) note many things business owners can do in order to ensure they are being accessible and inclusive to all people. Firstly, they can offer training to their employees to ensure they have positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and can have positive interactions with those people. Secondly, they can train their employees on how to properly communicate with people who might struggle with communication challenges such as being deaf or having a speech delay. Thirdly, they can provide information pertaining to their business in a wide range of accessible formats such as text and pictures. Fourthly, they need to promote effective listening to ensure their customers are

getting their needs met. Implementing all of these customer service aspects can increase the inclusiveness of a business.

Not only does communication and customer service need to be inclusive, but the built environment also needs to be inclusive in order for all people to be able to participate in the services a business offers. Hill (2011) notes, the built environment needs to be barrier free. This means there needs to be enough space for people with wheelchairs and service animals to be able to move freely throughout the built environment without coming across any barriers. There should also be suitable and appropriate signage throughout the business in order to ensure all people can interpret the built environment (Solarah and Johnson 2017). Addressing the built environment and customer service standards are considered best practices in trying to make a business more accessible and inclusive.

## **2.5 Summary**

The reviewed literature provides necessary background information to frame this research project. The review of the legislation indicates what business owners need to include within their businesses. This information is required in order to understand whether businesses are considered accessible or not. The literature also makes it evident that there are many benefits for businesses when they implement proper accessibility standards. Based on the financial benefits of becoming more accessible, there seems to be many reasons for business owners to make their businesses accessible. However, other studies have shown that business owners are not catering to accessibility because they think it will be too costly. This demonstrates there is a disconnect between what business owners think accessibility will cost them and what it actually costs. The literature also demonstrates there are many ways to make a business accessible. This includes,

but is not limited to, the physical environment, customer service and communications such as signage and websites.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

This study used multiple methods of study. An exploratory approach utilizing a transect method was used to identify the participants of the study. A stakeholder meeting was conducted with the Council for People with Disabilities to inform research design and results. Surveys and interviews were conducted with the participants to gain understanding of attitudes of business owners towards accessibility in Downtown Peterborough.

#### **3.1 Exploratory Method**

This project was completed using a transect method. Due to time constraints, practicality and suggestions made from the DBIA and our faculty advisor, a transect method was identified as the best option. Two streets were chosen, George Street and Charlotte Street within the DBIA boundaries, with a wide variety of businesses to study for the project. The scope of the study was defined as a storefront study. Therefore, only businesses which were accessible from the sidewalk were surveyed.

#### **3.2 Profile of Transect**

The study area for this project is Downtown Peterborough, Ontario. This area, as seen in Figure 3.1, consists of two streets that were surveyed: George Street and Charlotte Street. George Street and Charlotte Street were studied within the DBIA boundaries, which ends at Bethune Street on the west side, Murry Street on the north, the Otonabee River on the east, and Dalhousie Street on the south.



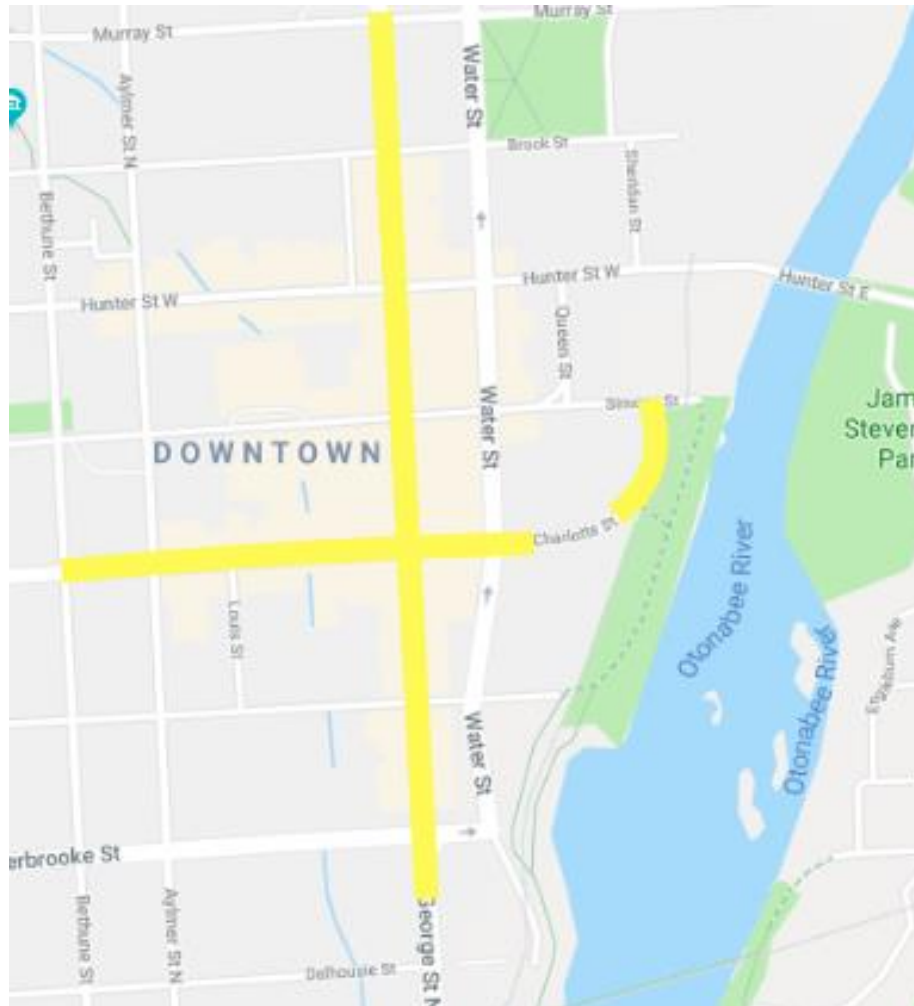


Figure 3.1: Map of transect area within Downtown Peterborough

### 3.3 Stakeholder Meeting

A stakeholders' meeting was held prior to designing the survey and interview guides to gain a better understanding of what challenges people with disabilities face in Downtown Peterborough. In the Stakeholder Meeting, individuals in Peterborough with a variety of different disabilities were invited to take part and share their knowledge and stories. Appendix 7.5 illustrates the questions which were developed to help begin and guide conversation. These individuals shared where accessibility is lacking in Downtown Peterborough and where they feel accessibility can improve. The information that was gained from this meeting was used to help

design the survey and interview guides for the business owners. It also provided insights for analyzing the survey and interview results.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Ethics**

This project has been approved by the Trent School of the Environment Research Ethics Committee. On Friday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the ethics application was submitted in hard copy to the administrative assistant of the Trent School of the Environment. The application included: the survey, interview guide, letter of information and informed consent. On Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the application was approved, and no alterations were needed. The survey, interview guide, letter of information and informed consent can be found in the appendices of this report.

#### **3.4.2 Survey**

The first phase of the data collection involved distributing and collecting surveys. The survey consisted of both closed and open-ended questions. Appendix 7.6 illustrates the questions which were asked in the survey. Surveys were distributed to almost all businesses found within the boundaries of the transects with a storefront. Distribution of surveys occurred in person, going door to door at three different times within the day to account for the different hours of operation. They were distributed over three days: once in the mid-morning, once at the beginning of the afternoon and once in the late afternoon. Surveys were not distributed to a few businesses because their hours of operation did not coincide with the times at which distribution was occurring. There were also a few businesses where the researchers did not feel comfortable entering for personal safety reasons and consequently those businesses were not represented in

the survey data. In most cases, the researchers left the survey with an employee or owner with instructions for a manager or store owner to complete the survey when time permitted. The researchers told the employees when they would return for the surveys. In six cases the manager or store owner filled the survey out on the spot with the researchers present. In total, 36 responses were received, and the data remained completely anonymous.

### **3.4.3 Interview**

The second phase of the research methods involved interviews. Participants were contacted first by email utilizing the contact information found on the DBIA website. From the first round of emails sent out, two business owners responded that they would be willing to participate in an interview. These participants were from the retail and medical sector. Phone calls were made to dozens of other businesses requesting their participation in an interview. Through this process two more participants were identified, one from the food and beverage sector and another from the retail sector. Representatives from the financial and service sector were contacted via email and over the phone twice, each at different times and days. However, there was no business identified from those respective sectors who were willing to participate in the interview process. In total, 4 interviews were conducted; two from the retail sector, one from the food and beverage sector and one from the medical sector. The interviews lasted close to 10 minutes and participants were asked six questions. Appendix 7.7 indicates the questions participants were asked. The interviews were voice recorded and the researchers also took handwritten notes. The interviews were then transcribed word for word into Microsoft Word.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Once all of the data had been collected, the data analysis phase began. In this phase, descriptive analyses were used first. Throughout this stage, graphs of the data were created to help visualize the results, in order to compare different sectors and all results. These graphs helped distinguish similarities within the downtown businesses and the differences businesses have that set them apart from each other. Following the descriptive analysis, thematic analyses were used in order to study the interview results. The recurring themes from the interviews were recorded to compare sectors and results. As well, these themes were used to compare with the interview results from each section. An exploratory analysis was used to see if the data sets showed any previously unknown relationships and make new connections.

## **4. FINDINGS**

This section outlines the findings from our stakeholder meeting, surveys and interviews. It represents the raw data that was collected in the form of graphs, tables and direct quotations. The survey results and interview questions are presented in the order in which the questions were asked to participants. The themes and trends that were found are presented in the discussion of this section. It also identifies the most important discoveries regarding accessibility in Downtown Peterborough.

### **4.1 Stakeholder Meeting**

Understanding the experiences of local community members who have a disability is critical in understanding the accessibility challenges and successes of Downtown Peterborough businesses. To better recognize the barriers faced, a stakeholder meeting was held where different members of the community who have a disability were invited to share their experiences. In one case, a parent was present and was speaking on behalf of his son. The participants in the meeting were from diverse backgrounds and had different abilities. There were individuals of varying ages ranging from 20 to 70. The group consisted of 40% male and 60% female. Finally, the participants had varied abilities with some having visible disabilities and others having invisible disabilities. Appendix 7.6 demonstrates the series of questions which were used as a guide to lead the meeting.

When asked about their personal experiences in Downtown Peterborough businesses, an overwhelming number of responses discussed poor customer service they had received. They shared the experience of how some employees were unwilling to accommodate for their needs, such as not moving sandwich board signs out of the way, so they could easily move through the

sidewalks. It was also the experience of some participants that some employees were not treating them with the respect they deserve and were rude and condescending. In one case, employees denied service because of challenges in communication and not knowing how to accommodate for the specific need. It was noted by the participants that they do not want employees to assume they know how to accommodate for their disability, rather, they would want to be asked how they would like to be helped, or if they need any assistance. Based on the participants' experiences with Downtown Peterborough, it would appear that there are some significant gaps within the customer service aspects of the businesses which need to be addressed.

However, at the same time, within the conversation it was mentioned there were some businesses that exemplified exceptional customer service to the participants. In some instances, when a communication barrier was limiting their ability to receive full service, employees would write notes or use text messaging to communicate with the individual. When stairs or physical barriers were limiting the use of a business, some employees would offer to bring items outside for the individual to look at and use. It was made evident when an employee makes the effort to accommodate, the customer satisfaction was improved, and the individuals were much more likely to return to that business for service again. There appears to be differences within Downtown Peterborough businesses when it comes to customer service. Some businesses are not being inclusive while at the same time other businesses are being inclusive of people with disabilities.

In addition to the wide variety of customer service experiences, individuals with disabilities also commented on the physical barriers that the street poses. Often sidewalks have many obstacles that need to be overcome. The sidewalks are too often crowded with bikes and sandwich boards. Both bikes and sandwich boards crowd the sidewalks making the pathway

narrow and difficult for those with mobility aids to navigate. Businesses need to be aware of the sandwich board placement, so they do not unintentionally prohibit people from using their store, or the sidewalk in general. It is important to note that what one individual deems as accessible may not be accessible to another. Therefore, the importance of asking the individual what is needed for accommodation is much more beneficial than assuming. Throughout the meeting, it became evident that there was a perception by the participants that businesses in the downtown core assume that they are accessible because they do not have a step into their business. However, if a business has a “lip” while getting into the store, that means it is inaccessible to some. Wheelchairs are much more mobile and accessible than power chairs. Therefore, if a business has a “lip” a power chair cannot access the establishment.

The participants also discussed how making a business fully accessible cannot be easy for business owners. It was discussed that people with disabilities should not fully put the responsibility on business owners. They recognized it can be difficult for business owners to meet the mandated requirements due to constraints such as not having enough money or simply not being educated regarding what they need to implement within their business. The participants discussed the need for them as people with disabilities to work with the community in order to help business owners make their business more inclusive and accessible. It was suggested showcasing businesses that are accessible and how they are accessible through outlets such as social media or the newspaper is a good way to help make Downtown Peterborough inclusive. It would provide business owners who are doing a good job surrounding accessibility to receive credit for their work. Furthermore, it would provide other businesses that may not be as inclusive with strategies and ideas concerning how they could make their businesses more inclusive.

In conclusion, the stakeholder meeting made it clear that there are significant gaps in customer service found within Downtown Peterborough. It was also made evident that while some businesses may not be inclusive, others are inclusive. It was also recognized that people with disabilities understand it must be difficult for business owners to make their businesses inclusive since there are such a wide variety of needs which need to be accommodated. Based on the participants' insights and contributions, it seems that addressing customer service and providing appropriate training to employees is the most important factor which needs to be addressed in order to make Downtown Peterborough businesses more inclusive.

## 4.2 Survey Results

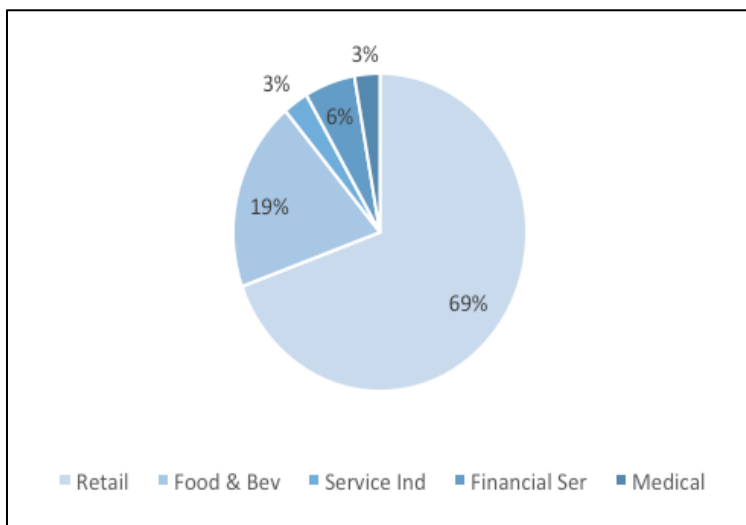


Figure 4.1: What sector does your business belong to?

Figure 4.1 indicates that the majority of the responses from the survey came from the retail sector which comprised 69% of the total responses. Food and beverage were the second most represented sector making up 19% of total responses. The financial sector shows the third highest response rate making up 6% of total responses. The service and medical sectors had the lowest response percentage with both sectors comprising 3% of the total response rate. These



percentages appear to be somewhat consistent with Downtown Peterborough as a whole. Based on the viewing of the DBIA website, the majority of businesses within the DBIA fall within the retail sector, followed by the food and beverage sector. These sectors are then followed by the service, financial and medical sectors (DBIA, 2018).

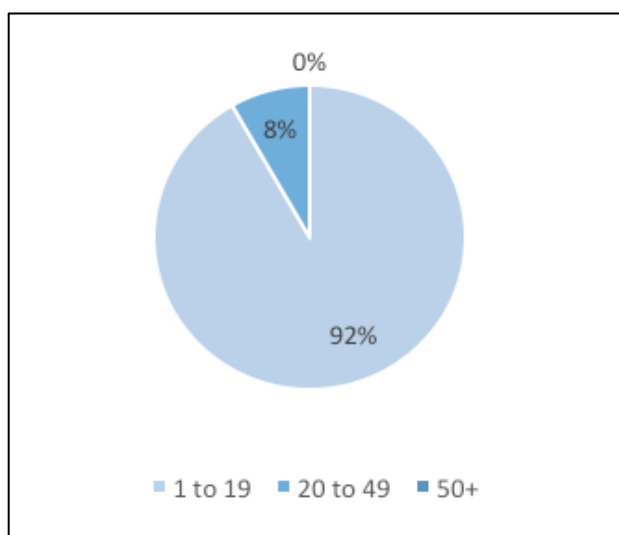


Figure 4.2: How many employees do you have in your business?

Figure 4.2 indicates how many workers the businesses under study employ. The majority of respondents, with 92% of businesses indicated they employ between 1 to 19 people. At the same time, 8% of businesses employ 20 to 49 people. There were no businesses which indicated they employed over 50 people. These statistics are important because they demonstrate that the majority of downtown businesses are relatively small. This has implications for the accessibility requirements they are expected to adhere to. It also has implications for the types of resources the businesses have available to them, such as money. The literature noted some small businesses do not have the resources available to them to make their businesses accessible. Therefore, the size of the business can provide insights into how accessible and inclusive the business may be.

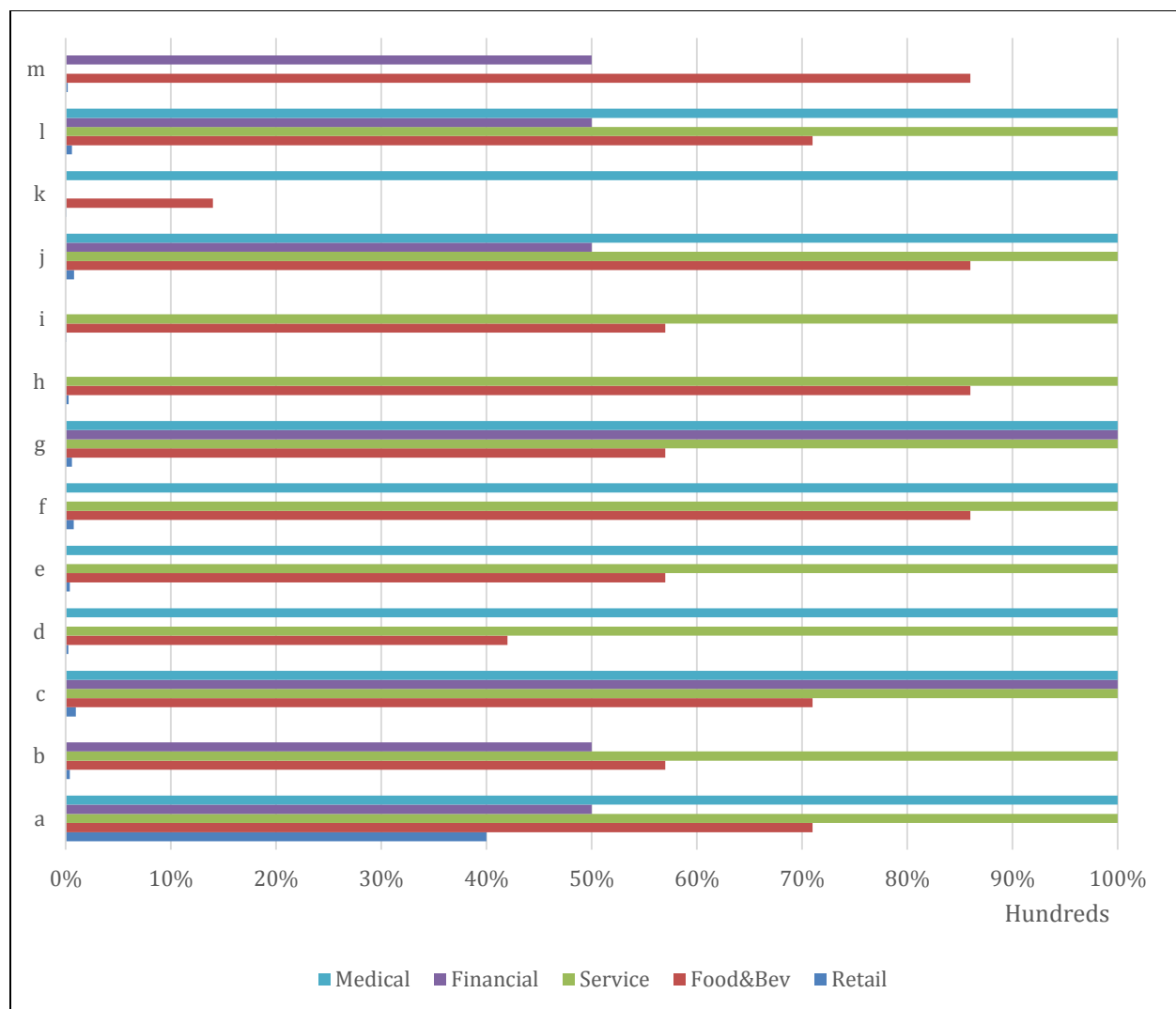


Figure 4.3: What accessibility services and features does your business provide? (select all that apply)

- a: Training for staff to serve customers of all abilities
- b: Training for staff on the accessibility requirements that apply to their job
- c: Welcome service animals and support persons
- d: Have accessible parking spaces available
- e: Have at least one service counter that is accessible for people with mobility aids (low enough counter to interact with the person providing service, and enough room under the counter for a wheelchair)
- f: The waiting line is wide enough for people with disabilities to move through easily with their mobility aids
- g: Waiting area with seating \*note: does not apply to all sectors
- h: If you have tables, 1/9 of them are accessible
- i: If you have more than 9 tables, 20% of them are accessible \*note: does not apply to all sectors

j: Walking paths that accommodate the width of a mobility aid

k: Access to all storeys within the building via an elevator

l: Barrier free path of travel

m: Washrooms that are barrier free and accessible (including wide doorways, grab bars, counter heights, signage)

Figure 4.3 demonstrates training for staff regarding how to serve people of all abilities does occur in some businesses. Overwhelmingly, almost all businesses report they would welcome a support animal or support persons into their businesses. It is made clear most businesses do not have accessible parking spaces. The data shows some businesses provide counter space and waiting lines which are accessible to people. Of the businesses that have tables, most of them have the proper ratio of accessible tables. The majority of businesses report they have barrier free areas of travel. Lastly, many businesses do not have an accessible bathroom.

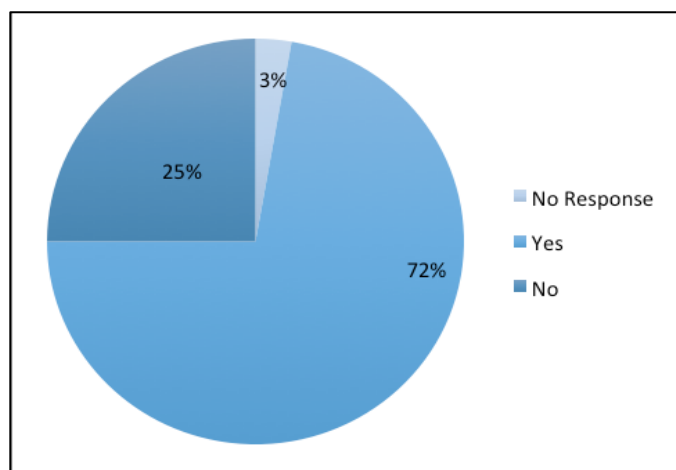


Figure 4.4: Are you aware of the AODA

Figure 4.4 demonstrates the vast majority, 72% of respondents, indicated they are aware of the existence of AODA, while 25% of respondents indicated they are not aware of the legislation. This is a troubling statistic because the AODA is a law which has been in place since

2005 with a goal of making Ontario completely accessible and inclusive by 2025. Based on this statistic, it is clear that a sizeable portion of the business population is not aware of the existence of the legislation. If they are unaware of the legislation and what it entails, they may not be creating or fostering an inclusive and accessible space. Furthermore, if they are not aware that the legislation exists, this may provide insights into how they perceive accessibility within their businesses.

Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- That people with disabilities should be accommodated</li> <li>- We are unfortunately not AODA compliant because our entrance does not have a ramp, nor does the back of our store (2-3 steps lower than main level)</li> <li>- The ability to serve all people, regardless of ability</li> <li>- I know that it's important that the store is accessible to all persons with any kind of disability, especially in terms of mobility. Because the store is not fully accessible, I try and help anyone in/out, carry things, hold things, bring things to eye level</li> <li>- Not much legislation, everything possible</li> <li>- To provide barrier free shopping experience. To be treated with the same respect and consideration as others. To welcome service animals</li> <li>- Store owner's responsibility</li> <li>- A copy of the act is in our policy manual</li> <li>- Sets standards or businesses to serve people with accessibility needs</li> </ul>
Food and Beverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- That accommodation of persons with disabilities is the law rather than a courtesy</li> </ul>
Service Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- None</li> </ul>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full AODA Training is mandatory company wide</li> </ul>
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Automatic doors, parking outside- handicapped, all accessibility measures were to be in places over 3 years, employee training standards updates</li> </ul>

Table 4.1: What do you know about the legislation? What do you do to accommodate the legislation?

Respondents were asked to describe their understandings of ADOA. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the exact responses the business owners reported. Based on the responses, it appears that some respondents know AODA is a piece of legislation which sets standards for businesses

to follow to ensure people of all abilities are able to access services. However, within the responses there does not seem to be any indication that business owners understand the specific components of the legislation. There appears to be some mention of making the physical environment barrier free. This would indicate some business owners are aware that their physical environment needs to be accessible. There seems to be a slight indication that accessibility also includes customer service and treating people with disabilities respectfully. There were 12 people out of 25 respondents who actually provided an answer to this question. Less than 50% of respondents provided an answer. This is important because it may indicate that they do not have enough knowledge about the legislation to provide a written answer about it. In conclusion, there appears to be a lack of understanding of what the AODA is and what it is comprised of.

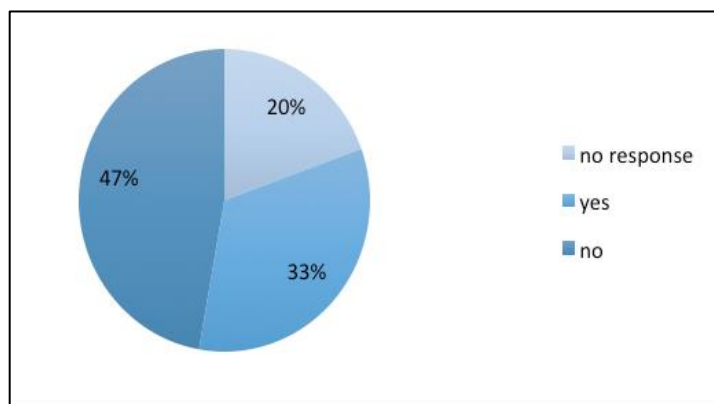


Figure 4.5: Are you aware of the Accessible Customer Service standards?

Figure 4.5 showcases that one third of respondents are aware of the accessible customer service standards which went into effect on January 2010 (Hill, 2010). Almost 50% of respondents are not aware of the existence of these standards. This is significant because if they are not aware of the existing standards, they cannot include or implement those standards into their businesses.

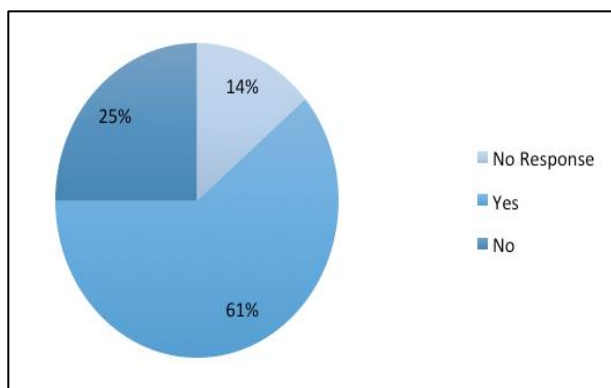


Figure 4.6: Is your business accessible to all people?

Figure 4.6 demonstrates that the vast majority, with 61% of respondents, state that their business is accessible to all people. Only 25% state that their business is not accessible to all people. This is significant because it demonstrates that many business owners think their business is accessible to all people, but when compared to the experiences of those with disabilities, the results are not consistent. The stakeholder meeting made it evident that many Downtown Peterborough businesses are not accessible to them. This graph contradicts those experiences. It suggests that business owners may perceive their businesses to be accessible to all people when in reality it is not fully accessible.

Retail	- Clothing/goods are all on one floor, doorway is clear and aisles
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	<p>are accessible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accessible entrance, chair lift and or ramp to back lower retail space</li> <li>- We have seats, wide doors and we make face to face accommodations for our customers in wheelchairs. Note pads for hearing impaired to communicate</li> <li>- No step, door wide enough, a lot of floor space</li> <li>- Front is fully accessible</li> <li>- Flat/ main floor entry, no wheelchair button access but we open door for people with wheelchairs</li> <li>- In every way possible</li> <li>- Wide doorways, open walkways between display areas</li> <li>- Doors are at sidewalk level. Racks are kept further apart to allow a path around and between them</li> <li>- Front door is level with sidewalk but must be pushed open</li> <li>- Make sure to keep main aisles free of obstructions wide enough, have staff available to open doors etc. as needed</li> <li>- Automated, push button on rear store door. Elevator. Wide aisles. Accessible washroom</li> <li>- All one level- low counters- comfortable seating</li> <li>- Power door operator, policies and practices to ensure equitable access</li> </ul>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Automatic doors, customized customer service</li> </ul>
Food and Beverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ramp outside, accessible washrooms, space between tables, some staff know ASL</li> <li>- Low counters, wide path, no steps at door</li> </ul>
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As the pharmacist, I can leave from behind the counter to counsel patients on medications wherever they are in the store. Small store, one large alleyway</li> </ul>

Table 4.2: How do you make it accessible?

Table 4.2 indicates all the ways in which business owners perceive their business as being accessible and inclusive. The vast majority of responses focus on the built environment. Out of nineteen responses only seven people made mention of customer service as being a way to make their business inclusive. This is significant because it demonstrates business owners are perceiving the built environment as being the most important way to make their business inclusive. Many owners seem to be failing to identify customer service, employment, transportation and communication technologies as methods of making their business more

accessible. They seem to be mostly focusing on one section (built environment) out of five sections which have been identified with AODA (Access Ontario, 2017).

Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I can't do much for blind people, as we have no books in braille. Not easily wheelchair accessible. I go outside to ask how I can help</li> <li>- Our front entrance is not wheelchair accessible</li> <li>- In the sense that we are not online</li> <li>- Because of our front step being at our main and only entrance it proves difficult if/when someone with a wheelchair/walker comes in. We usually help them in if they'll allow it</li> <li>- Stairs no ramp</li> <li>- Step on street could be a hazard to visually impaired</li> </ul>
Food and Beverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not have an automatic door</li> </ul>
Not for Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We have stairs and lack washrooms with grab bars</li> </ul>
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If a patron were deaf or blind this may present difficulty communicating in a timely manner</li> </ul>

Table: 4.3: Why is your business inaccessible?

Table 4.3 indicates how business owners perceive their businesses as not being accessible. Again, there seems to be a focus on the built environment. Most of the responses indicate they are not accessible due to something not being present, such as a ramp within the physical environment. However, one respondent did indicate they are not accessible because they are not online. This is significant because it demonstrates that some business owners are aware that providing communication in multiple formats is a method of making their businesses inclusive to all people.



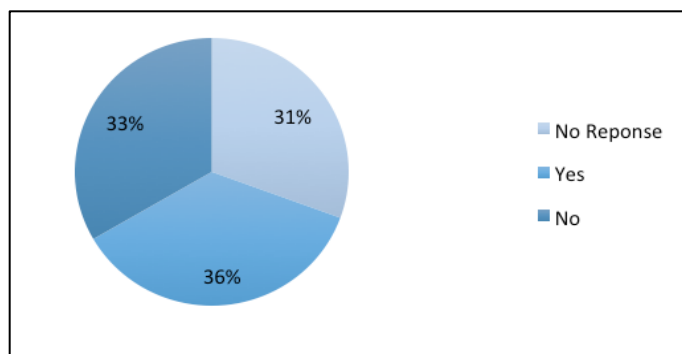


Figure 4.7: Is money a barrier to making your business accessible?

Figure 4.7 indicates that money is a barrier to 36% of businesses. This is a sizeable amount of the population that may not be able to make their businesses accessible because they fear they cannot afford to pay for the accommodations. As the literature notes, this can affect how a business owner may perceive accessibility and inclusion in their business. Figure ? also indicates one third of the population does not see money as being a barrier for making their business accessible. This is significant as it indicates there may be other barriers present which are preventing business owners from making their businesses fully accessible.

Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Door isn't automatic</li> <li>- Accessible washroom</li> <li>- Automatic door opener</li> <li>- Front step, counter, bathroom</li> <li>- Money, old building</li> <li>- Ramp at rear and elevator for basement</li> <li>- City regulations prevent ramp installment</li> <li>- Common sense</li> <li>- Us!</li> <li>- Space shortage</li> <li>- Front door</li> <li>- Front door</li> <li>- Cost for renovation demand for accessibility low due to customer base and number of people who cycle</li> </ul>
Financial Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Our office is rented; therefore, the building owner would have to approve any construction etc.</li> </ul>
Food and Beverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stairs in front and back entrance</li> </ul>
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manager only report to owner and landlord. Money</li> </ul>

Table 4.4: What barriers exist to making your business inclusive and accessible?

Table 4.4 demonstrates the other barriers business owners perceive as existing that inhibit their businesses from being fully accessible. For the most part, business owners perceive barriers to exist within the physical environment. There were many responses discussing the lack of accessible entrances. There were also responses of not being able to make a change because they do not own the building and going through this process can be long. Based on these responses, business owners do not perceive other aspects of their business such as customer service to be a barrier in creating an inclusive space. This is significant because it was made clear from the stakeholder meeting that many people with disabilities do not find businesses accessible based on customer service they have received.

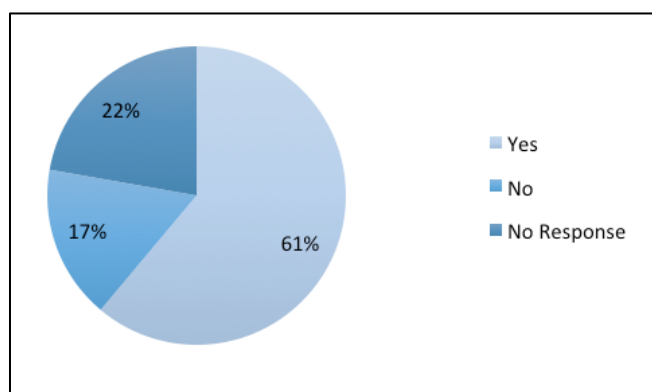


Figure 4.8: Are you comfortable asking for help on how to make your businesses more accessible?

Figure 4.8 indicates that 61% of businesses would be comfortable asking someone else for help regarding how to make their business accessible. At the same time, 17% of people are not comfortable asking this question. It was noted within the literature that some business owners are reporting fatigue in trying to figure out how to make their businesses accessible. The literature also noted business owners are having trouble determining what they need to do in order to make their businesses accessible. Based on the literature, one might expect that more than 61% of business owners would be willing to ask for help. This provides insights into how

they might perceive accessibility. Since some are not comfortable asking for help, they may not view accessibility in their business as a priority and something that needs to be addressed.

### **4.3 Interview Results**

To understand the business owner's perspective on accessibility in Downtown Peterborough, four interviews were conducted from three different sectors: retail, food and beverage and health. Each business owner was asked the same six questions so that the results would be compared to find themes within the answers.

The first question asked businesses about their understanding of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA). All four businesses had similar answers, indicating very limited understanding of the act. It was common between businesses that they knew they needed to make the environment as accessible as possible. However, they were not sure how to make it accessible, nor did they know what the specific accessibility requirements were. Business owners understood that they should be accessible to everyone and can never turn away business from anyone who has a disability, nor can they discriminate on hiring based on a potential employee's abilities. One business understood that moving forward, any major renovations to the businesses building needed to abide by AODA. All businesses agreed that they did not have a thorough understanding of how to be accessible and what is needed to be accessible.

The second question asked business owners how they make their businesses accessible. The interviewees agreed that they do everything they can to make the customers' experiences as pleasant as possible and will do everything they can to help accommodate their needs. If there are any obvious barriers, they do their best to remove them. All of the businesses try to keep their aisles wide enough for mobility aids. One business owner commented on how her business does not have braille menus, but the staff is more than willing to take the time to read the menu to the

customer. They try to make all possible changes, without having to change the structure of the building. Many of the business owners stated that it is hard to make their business more accessible because they rent the space and do not own the building. Therefore, they cannot make any structural changes, such as widening doorways, making bathrooms wheelchair friendly and larger or incorporating automatic doors, as they must have the landlord's agreeance to make any physical changes.

The third question asked the businesses if they had any specific training on accessibility for their employees. All businesses agreed that they had no formal training on accessibility. However, they did all train their employees to do absolutely everything they can to help a customer. They state that they train their employees to be good in customer service, to be polite, and to bend over backwards for the customers, yet do not have any accessibility, disability or AODA training.

When asking participants about whether they employ any persons with disabilities their responses varied. At the time, currently none of the four businesses employ anyone with a disability. One store commented that they take advantage of the student programs to help people with special needs gain employment. These programs are run by the government and businesses are reimbursed by the government for the work these people do to give the employers an incentive to hire them. This employer states that they are not given the same amount of responsibilities as other staff members, but they are given as much responsibility as possible. Another retail store stated that they would not consider hiring someone with a disability as they would not be able to complete any of the physical tasks that stores would require of them. The other businesses said that they have not had anyone with a disability apply, but if they did they would give that person a fair chance and equal opportunity. They would never turn them away.

The participants were then asked to identify the greatest barriers they face in making their businesses accessible. There were two common answers received: finances and renting the building. The majority of owners said that for small businesses, it is always about financing. They would make the necessary changes if they were given the money but would be unlikely to do the changes if they had to pay themselves. As well, barriers are faced when the business owners do not own the building. They are not able to make structural changes that would be needed to allow the building to reach the accessibility requirements. They would need the landlord to agree to finance the suggested renovations. As well, in Peterborough many buildings are heritage buildings and cannot be structurally changed. However, one sector stated that if changes were needed, they would finance it themselves and find the money to make the necessary changes as they believe in the importance of accommodating every person.

The final question that businesses were asked was if they believe accessibility is important. Three businesses said yes, “just because they have a disability doesn’t mean that they don’t shop, and they don’t want to come in and see. They have the right to come in.” Another believed accessibility was important within reason.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

Our surveys and interviews demonstrate that the majority of business owners are aware of the pre-existing legislation surrounding accessibility. They understand that they need to be inclusive to all people and are aware they need to accommodate. They know that they cannot turn people away, regardless of ability. However, business owners in Downtown Peterborough are not aware of the specific requirements in the accessibility legislation for Ontario. They do not know the specific standards they need to reach. Therefore, to answer our research question “How

knowledgeable are local business owners and what are their attitudes about the pre-existing legislation surrounding disability accessibility?”, local business owners are not knowledgeable about the pre-existing legislation surrounding disability accessibility, but their positive attitudes towards inclusion suggest that they are interested in learning the standards and meeting those standards.

Through analyzing survey and interview results it was made evident that business owners perceive their customer service as being important to making businesses accessible. They see that providing good customer service is a way to be inclusive and they strive to provide the best services possible through on the job training. Many businesses reported that their customer service was optimal. This result provides insight into the research question “What do local business owners perceive as an accessible and inclusive business?”, proving that owners believe customer service is key to making their businesses inclusive and accessible for all. These attitudes corroborate what has been found within the scholarly literature studied. It is clear that business owners identify customer service as valuable, and the literature states that in order to foster an inclusive and accessible environment, good customer service is crucial. The customer service that business owners think they are providing is not consistent with the experience that persons with disabilities have in Peterborough’s downtown. From the Stakeholder consultation, people with disabilities shared that in many instances they had unpleasant customer service interactions. They reported feelings of exclusion and were made to feel as if they were a burden. In one specific encounter, the employee was unwilling to accommodate and therefore turned this individual away. These individuals also disclosed experiences where they were made to feel devalued and were not treated with the same respect as able-bodied customers. They were made to feel this way when employees would talk to their able-bodied companion rather than to them

as the customer who was trying to make the interaction. There were multiple other narratives of being talked down to, being disrespected, and feelings of discrimination that left the disabled person frustrated and not wanted to return to the business.

It is important to note that although there were many instances of poor customer service, there were also reports of stellar customer service where employees were extremely accommodating and inclusive. In these situations, the customer was respected, and the employee simply asked how they could help, and actively listened to the response. Although 17% of business owners are not comfortable asking how to make their business more accessible, people with disabilities state that asking them how they can help is the best way to accommodate.

In the survey results, 61% of business owners stated that their businesses were fully accessible. However, this is their perception of accessibility in their business, and is not completely accurate with accessibility standards. Therefore, it is not 61% of businesses in Downtown Peterborough that are accessible. This is significant because it demonstrates that many business owners think their business is accessible to all people but when compared to the experiences of those with disabilities in Downtown Peterborough, the results are not consistent. The stakeholder meeting made it evident that many Downtown Peterborough businesses are not accessible to them. Survey and interview participants consistently only identified the mobility disabilities as requiring accommodations. Therefore, they think an inclusive business is only one where the physical environment is changed and adapted. Many participants only recognize wheelchairs and mobility aids as needing accommodation and lack the awareness of the variety of disabilities that require different accommodations. The literature review confirms that not all accommodations are major physical changes to the building. The majority are small changes that require minimum effort such as having a notepad available for those with hearing impairments or

creating accessible documents. These findings help answer, “What steps have local business owners already taken to become accessible and inclusive in their environment?”. Many business owners have done their best to accommodate through welcoming service animals and support people, creating barrier free pathways, having accessible parking spaces, wide waiting lines and seats available in waiting areas. They have also taken steps within their customer service to improve accessibility such as opening non-automatic doors and assisting in their shopping.

When considering the research question, “What do business owners see as barriers to making their business accessible?”, many owners felt that finances was the largest barrier. The literature states that two-thirds of all accommodations cost less than \$500 and are a one-time investment (Hernandez, McDonald, Divilbiss, Horin, Velcoff, and Donoso, 2008). Business owners perceive accommodations as expensive and unrealistic, when in reality, the literature demonstrates this is untrue. Reports find that for every dollar a company invests in accommodations, they will experience an average of \$40 in benefits from increased spending (Hernandez et al., 2008). Peterborough business owners also believe that barriers exist due to their status as renters. It was consistently identified throughout the data collection that the majority of businesses do not own their buildings, and as a result would need the landlord’s approval, creating more work for them. Another barrier to making physical changes to a business was that many downtown businesses are considered heritage buildings, and this status exempts buildings from being physically altered to become more accessible. This finding is unique to Downtown Peterborough and was not identified in the literature.

One of the five sections of the AODA addresses employment for persons with disabilities. Although currently, none of the businesses interviewed employ a person with disabilities, the majority of attitudes demonstrate they would hire an individual with disabilities



if they applied as a suitable candidate. Two businesses reported that they have employed persons with disabilities in the past, demonstrating that business owners have positive attitudes towards inclusion. One business stated that they would not hire a person with a disability because they would not be able to meet the physical requirements of the retail job. Once again, this is consistent with the finding that employers are only considering physical exceptionalities when thinking of people with disabilities.

One research question asked if accessibility was a priority for them. All businesses reported that accessibility was a main priority for them and they would never want to exclude a person based on ability. They believe that inclusion and making the business accessible is important in order to accommodate all potential customers.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In this section the contributions of this study to the Peterborough Area are identified, the limitations of this study are presented and the continuing opportunities for further research are noted.

### **5.1 Contributions**

The findings of this Community Based Research project provide the community with a variety of contributions that will help make Downtown Peterborough more accessible. This project makes the community aware of the needs of the population. It reveals the specific areas in which persons with disabilities feel Peterborough businesses can improve their accessibility and customer service. As well, through the literature review of the existing legislation, and through the interviews and surveys revealing the businesses knowledge of this legislation, the gaps in understanding are revealed. This project highlights how much the businesses need to learn in order to better accommodate their customers. In addition, this project has shown that there is a gap in the knowledge of how to make their businesses accessible, not only physically but in their service as well. With this knowledge, business owners may be able to better train their staff to serve the community more effectively, and BIG IDeA will be able to share with owners, how to make businesses more accessible for the community.

In addition, we believe that the recommendations we provide may create a more accessible downtown. These recommendations include:

- Highlight businesses who are excelling in creating accessible and inclusive spaces
- Provide business owners with an outline on the benefits of making their business accessible
- Implement specific accessibility training into businesses

- Provide business owners with a brief guide outlining simple ways to make their business more accessible

Following through in these recommendations would benefit the entire community including business owners, employees, and people with disabilities.

## **5.2 Limitations**

There are some limitations found within this research project. In order to make this project feasible within the time allotted for completion, two streets were used as the method of study. Therefore, the whole population of the DBIA was not considered within this project. Due to time constraints and odd hours of operation for some businesses, not every business within the transect completed a survey. Additionally, there were a few businesses where the researchers did not feel comfortable entering for safety concerns. These points are important to acknowledge because the results determined may not be fully representative of the population within the transect. The project was also limited because some participants did not realize the survey was on a double-sided piece of paper. As a result, the backside of seven out of thirty-six surveys were not completed. Finally, due to lack of business owner agreement to participate in the interview process, two out of five sectors were not represented in the results of the interviews. If this project were to be repeated, creating more time for completion would solve these limitations.

## **5.3 Continuing Research Opportunities**

The most evident opportunity for continuing research is the extension of the current research question to broaden the focus group to include all of Downtown Peterborough, rather than a transect and more than storefront businesses. This would allow a wider perspective on

how accessibility needs change based on sectors, and how storefront businesses cater to accessibility differently than non-storefront businesses.

In addition, continuing research opportunities could look to discover ways in which effective customer service could be implemented. This opportunity could increase accessibility training for the staff so that all businesses are aware of the needs, and the standards that they must meet. Furthermore, this research opportunity would allow the researchers to discover how physical changes could be made to make the store more accessible in an affordable way.

Through this project research, many participants responded stating that a major barrier to making their business accessible was financial strain. Therefore, if there were ways to make financing more affordable, businesses in Downtown Peterborough would be able to accommodate the larger community.

#### **5.4 Concluding Comments**

*” Inclusion is important. If you do not include everyone what is the point in being a business?”*

*- Research Participant*

Through this research, it is evident that Downtown Peterborough businesses are interested in becoming more accessible and want to make their businesses as inclusive as possible. It is our hope that with this project as an aid, owners will be able to see the discrepancies in the reality of the service and the standards that need to be met, so that they can work towards fostering environments that welcome all people regardless of their abilities. With the Council for Persons with Disabilities working in conjunction with the Downtown Business Improvement Area, the needs of people with disabilities can be vocalized and made known to those business owners.

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## **7. APPENDICES**

### **7.1 Ethics Approval**

Letter from Trent School of the Environment Research Ethics Committee

“Dear Shannon and Kathleen,

This note is to advise you that the Trent School of the Environment Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application for ethical review for your project, ‘Exploring the Attitudes and Decisions of Local Businesses in Relation to Disability Accessibility and Inclusion’.

The committee has approved your application as originally submitted.

Best wishes for a successful research project!

Sincerely,  
Stephen Bocking  
Chair,  
TSE Research Ethics Committee”

## 7.2 Informed Consent

**TRENT UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Geography, Research Ethics Committee**  
 Tel: (705) 748-1011 ext. 7686, E-mail: geography@trentu.ca

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Project title:** Exploring the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion

**Project description:** This project examines the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion in Downtown Peterborough. It looks at the knowledge local businesses have regarding disability legislation, and providing accessible services to all people.

**Researcher Name [student]:** Kathleen Walker  
**Phone No.** (416) 669-3114 **E-mail:** kathleenwalker@trentu.ca  
**Researcher Name [student]:** Shannon Shillinglaw  
**Phone No.** (705) 559-6268 **E-mail:** shannonshillinglaw@trentu.ca

**Supervisor [faculty]:** Prof. Mark Skinner **E-mail:** markskinner@trentu.ca

**Statement of Consent: As a participant in the above project, I understand the following:**

1. I have been fully informed by the researcher about the nature of the research and my participation in the project;
2. My participation is entirely voluntary. I may refuse to answer any or all questions and end the interview at any time;
3. The data resulting from the interview will not be used for any commercial purposes and will be strictly used for the advancement of research and social policy applications;
4. The information supplied during the interview will be kept confidential and my identity will not be used in any reports or other publications;
5. The information will be stored responsibly and my participation in the project will be known only to the researchers;
6. Any risks to my participation in the project are unforeseen by the researcher;
7. I have been provided with a copy of this informed consent form for my own records; and
8. I understand that this project has been approved by Trent University's Department of Geography's Research Ethics Committee.

**Participant**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Contact Information:**

\_\_\_\_\_



**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

### **7.3 Letter of Information: Interview**

Exploring the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion.

#### **Letter of Information Interview**

Dear Participant:

We are writing to request your participation in the Exploring the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion project, being completed for our community-based research project under the supervision of Prof. Mark Skinner in the Department of Geography at Trent University.

This project examines the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion in Downtown Peterborough. It looks at the knowledge local businesses have regarding disability legislation and providing accessible services to all people.

You are being contacted because we are interested to learn from your perspective as a business owner in regard to the project we are conducting. If you are willing to participate in the interview, your participation will be voluntary. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you find inapplicable and you may end the interview at any time. The interview will be transcribed onto a password protected and encrypted computer and will be destroyed two years after the completion of the project. Your name and identity will be kept confidential and will not be used in any reports or findings. The Department of Geography Research Ethics Committee at Trent University has approved this project.

If you are willing to participate or if you have any questions, please telephone or e-mail the contact information provided at the top of the page. For more information, you can also contact Prof. Mark Skinner, project supervisor ([markskinner@trentu.ca](mailto:markskinner@trentu.ca)).

Thank you for your consideration,

Kathleen Walker and Shannon Shillinglaw

## 7.4 Letter of Information Survey

Exploring the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion.

### Letter of Information Survey

Dear Participant:

We are writing to request your participation in the *Exploring the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion* project, being completed for our community-based research project under the supervision of Prof. Mark Skinner in the Department of Geography at Trent University.

This project examines the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion in Downtown Peterborough. It looks at the knowledge local businesses have regarding disability legislation and providing accessible services to all people.

You are being contacted because we are asking for your participation in this survey. If you are willing to complete this survey, your participation will be voluntary and would involve approximately 5-10 minutes. During the survey, you can refuse to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you find inapplicable and you may end the survey at any time. With the completion of this survey you are consenting to the information being transcribed onto a password protected and encrypted computer which will be destroyed two years after the completion of the project. Your name and identity will remain anonymous and will not be used in any reports or findings. The Department of Geography Research Ethics Committee at Trent University has approved this project. Our survey is located in the subsequent pages of this word document. **Please complete this survey and email it back to the following email address: [walkershillinglaw@gmail.com](mailto:walkershillinglaw@gmail.com).**

If you have any questions or concerns, please telephone or e-mail the contact information provided at the top of the page. For more information, you can also contact Prof. Mark Skinner, project supervisor ([markskinner@trentu.ca](mailto:markskinner@trentu.ca)).

Thank you for your consideration,

Kathleen Walker and Shannon Shillinglaw

## **7.5 Stakeholder Meeting Guiding Questions**

### Stakeholder Meeting

Guiding Questions:

Can you describe your personal experience in downtown Peterborough businesses?

How were the businesses accessible to you?

How were the businesses not accessible to you?

Where do you think they need to improve to be more accessible and inclusive?

In general, do you think downtown Peterborough is accessible and inclusive?

## 7.6 Survey

### Survey:

Exploring the attitudes & decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion

Thank for you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is important and appreciated. This survey is not meant to inconvenience you or put you at risk. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. All the information collected from the survey will be used only for the purposes of this study and will remain confidential. This survey is designed so that you remain anonymous. By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate.

What sector does your business best belong to?

Retail  Food and Beverage  Service Industry  Financial Services  Automotive

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How many employees do you have in your business?

1-19 ()      20-49 ()      50+ ()

What accessibility services and features does your business provide? (Select all that apply)

Training for staff to serve customers of all abilities ()

Training for staff on the accessibility requirements that apply to their job ()

Welcome service animals and support persons ()

Have accessible parking spaces available ()

Have at least one service counter that is accessible for people with mobility aids (low enough counter to interact with the person providing service, and enough room under the counter for a wheelchair) ()

The waiting line is wide enough for people with disabilities to move through easily with their mobility aids ()

Waiting area with seating ()

If you have tables, 1/9 of them are accessible ()

If you have more than 9 tables, 20% of them are accessible ()

Walking paths that accommodate the width of a mobility aid ()

Access to all storeys within the building via an elevator ()

Barrier free path of travel ()

Washrooms that are barrier free and accessible (including wide doorways, grab bars, counter heights, signage) ()

Are you aware of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)?

Yes  No

If yes, what do you know about the legislation? What do you do to accommodate the legislations?

Are you aware of the accessible customer service standards?

Yes  No

Is your business accessible to all people?

Yes  No

If yes, how do you make it accessible?

If no, why not?

Is money a barrier to making your business inclusive and accessible?

Yes  No

What barriers exist that limit your ability to make your business completely accessible?

Are you comfortable asking for help on how to make your business more accessible?

Yes  No

Thank you for your time completing this survey. All results you recorded will remain anonymous. Your input is greatly appreciated.

## 7.7 Interview

### Interview Questions

#### **Exploring the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion**

Introduction: This project examines the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion in Downtown Peterborough. It looks at the knowledge local businesses have regarding disability legislation and providing accessible services to all people.

Instructions: Please type your answers underneath the question.

1. Describe your understanding of the AODA?
2. How do you make your business accessible? (If yes) Why do you make your business accessible?
3. What training does your staff receive on accessibility?
4. Do you employ anyone with disabilities?
5. Are there limitations or barriers to making your business accessible? If so, what are they?
6. Do you believe it is important to make your business accessible?





7.8 Poster



# Accessibility in Downtown Peterborough Businesses



An exploration of the attitudes and decisions of local businesses in relation to disability accessibility and inclusion

GEOG 4030 Shannon Shillinglaw & Kathleen Walker 2017-2018

### RESEARCH GOALS

- How knowledgeable are businesses and what are their attitudes regarding accessibility legislation?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of responding to accessibility needs?
- What have business owners done to be accessible?
- What do owners perceive as an accessible business?
- What are barriers to making businesses accessible?
- How important is accessibility for businesses?

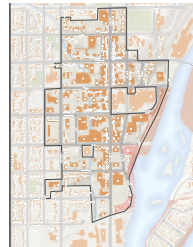


Figure 1: Map of DBIA



**“Inclusion is important. If you do not include everyone, what is the point in being in business?”**  
- Research Participant

Is money a barrier to making your business accessible?

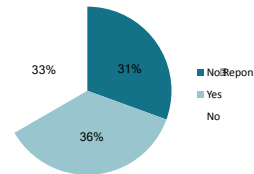


Figure 2: Survey Results Money is a barrier

### THEMATIC RESULTS

- Money is a barrier for accessibility (see Figure 2)
- Lack of legislation understanding
- Only considers physical disabilities when accommodating
- Lack of awareness of how to accommodate
- Businesses have no formal training on accessibility
- Gap in the service businesses think they provide, and the service people with disabilities feel they receive

### RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Literature Review** of legislation and scholarly sources
- **Exploratory Approach** of the DBIA, using a transect method of George Street and Charlotte Street (see Figure 1)
- **Stakeholder Consultation** with the Council for Persons with Disabilities to inform research design
- **Data Collection**
  - Surveyed 36 business owners
  - Interviewed 3 sectors

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement specific accessibility training
- Highlight businesses who are excelling in accessibility
- Provide business owners with an outline on the benefits of making their business accessible
- Provide business owners with a brief guide outlining simple ways to make their business more accessible



Faculty Advisor: Mark Skinner Project Coordinator: David Tough Host Supervisor: Simon Treviranus

## 7.9 PowerPoint Presentation for BIG IDeA

# PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF DOWNTOWN PETERBOROUGH BUSINESS OWNERS ON ACCESSIBILITY

Shannon Shillinglaw and Kathleen Walker

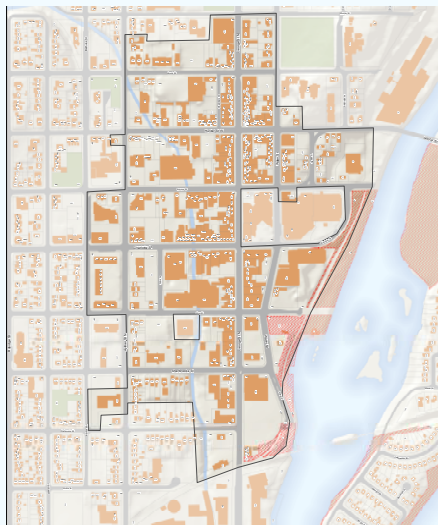
## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How knowledgeable are businesses and what are their attitudes surrounding accessibility legislation?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to responding to accessibility needs?
- What have businesses done to become accessible?
- What do owners perceive as an accessible environment?
- What are barriers to making businesses accessible?
- How important is accessibility for accessibility?



## RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Literature Review** of legislation and scholarly sources
- **Exploratory Approach** of the DBIA, using a transect method of George Street and Charlotte Street
- **Stakeholder Consultation** with the Council for Persons with Disabilities to inform research design
- **Data Collection:** surveys and interviews



Map of DBIA

## STAKEHOLDER MEETING

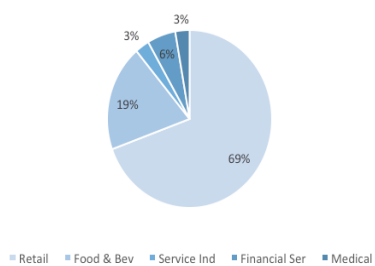
- Listened to their experiences in downtown Businesses
- Some businesses are accessible, but not all of downtown
- Narrative of poor customer service
- Very few commented on the physical limitations of store, however they did note the physical limitations of the sidewalks



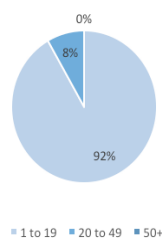
## SURVEY RESULTS

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

1: What sector does your business belong to?

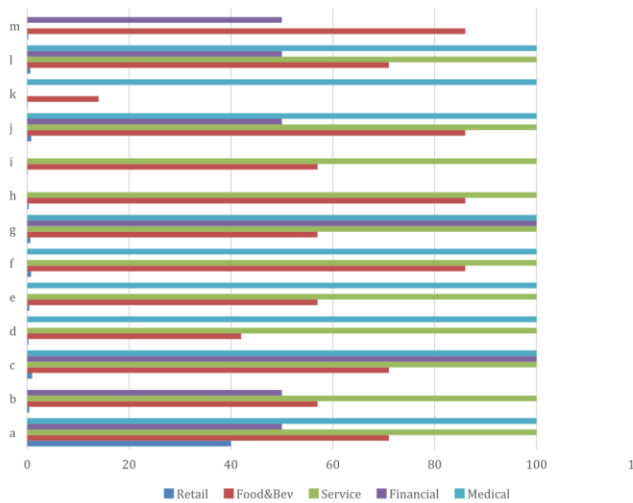


2: How many employees do you have in your business?



# ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES IN BUSINESSES

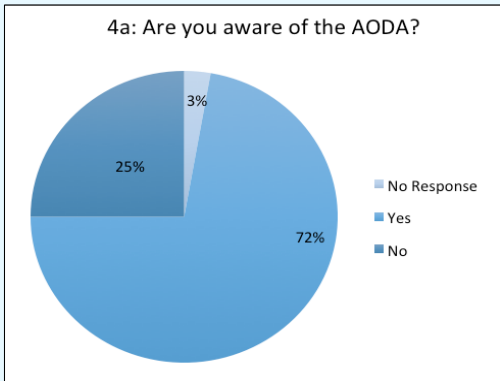
Question 3: What accessibility services and features does your business provide? (select all that apply)



- a:** Training for staff to serve customers of all abilities
- b:** Training for staff on the accessibility requirements that apply to their job
- c:** Welcome service animals and support persons
- d:** Have accessible parking spaces available
- e:** Have at least one service counter that is accessible for people with mobility aids (low enough counter to interact with the person providing service, and enough room under the counter for a wheelchair)
- f:** The waiting line is wide enough for people with disabilities to move through easily with their mobility aids
- g:** Waiting area with seating \*note: does not apply to all sectors
- h:** If you have tables, 1/9 of them are accessible
- i:** If you have more than 9 tables, 20% of them are accessible \*note: does not apply to all sectors
- j:** Walking paths that accommodate the width of a mobility aid
- k:** Access to all storeys within the building via an elevator
- l:** Barrier free path of travel
- m:** Washrooms that are barrier free and accessible (including wide doorways, grab bars, counter heights, signage)

# AODA AWARENESS

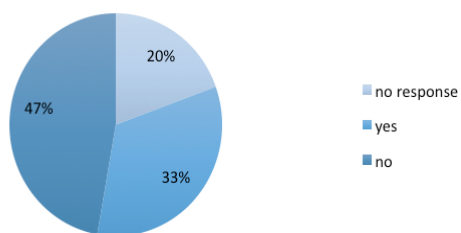
4a: Are you aware of the AODA?



- Many are aware of the existence of the AODA
- They understand that under legislation they need to be inclusive regardless of ability
- They do not know what the AODA includes specifically

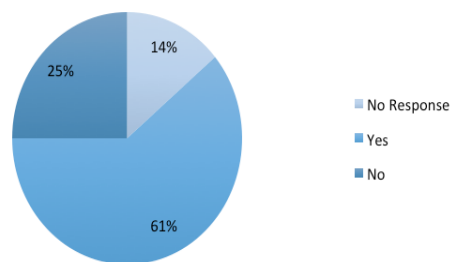
## CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

5: Are you aware of the Accessible Customer Service standards?



## DO YOU **PERCEIVE** YOUR BUSINESS AS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL PEOPLE?

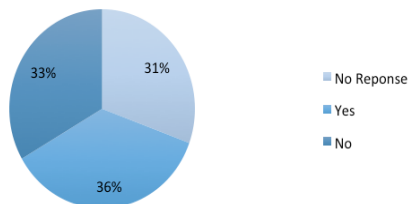
6: Is your business accessible to all people?



- Believe they are not accessible because of the built environment
- Believe accessibility is only about physical changes to a building

## IS MONEY A BARRIER?

7: Is money a barrier to making your business inclusive and accessible?



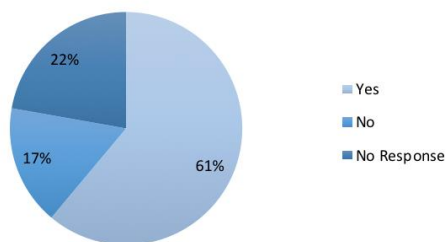
## WHAT OTHER BARRIERS EXIST IN BECOMING ACCESSIBLE?

- Renting
- Heritage Act
- Themselves
- Lack of knowledge
- Built environment
- Space shortage
- Believe that “need for accessibility is low”



## ASKING FOR HELP

Question 9: Are you comfortable asking for help on how to make your business more accessible?



## INTERVIEW RESULTS

- Believe that accessibility is important
- Accessibility is a priority
- No formal training for staff
- $\frac{3}{4}$  of businesses interviewed were open to the idea of hiring an individual with a disability
- They believe their customer service is stellar
- The 2 greatest barriers they face in making their business accessible is the landlord and money





## KEY FINDINGS

- Money is a barrier for accessibility
- Lack of legislation understanding
- **Only considers physical disabilities when accommodating**
- Lack of awareness of how to accommodate
- Businesses have no formal training on accessibility
- **Gap in the service businesses think they provide, and the service people with disabilities feel they receive**



## LIMITATIONS

- 7/36 failed to realize that the survey was double sided
- Transect approach (did not go to every storefront business in DBIA)
- Some stores we could not go to because of hours / comfort
- Only 3/5 sectors were willing to participate in interviews



## CONCLUSION

*“Inclusion is important. If you do not include everyone what is the point in being a business?” - Research Participant*